

October 15/ 28, 1986

Rt. Rev. Hilarion
Bishop of Manhattan
Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
75 B. 93rd Street
New York, NY 10128

Dear Vladika Hilarion,

Your blessing, please.

I must ask your forgiveness for not having replied to your letter of March 18/31, 1986, at an earlier date.

Your letter's purpose was to inform me of the feelings of the hierarchy in regards to one of our bulletins. The issue of the *Witness* referred to carried a reprint of an article which appeared in the *Synodal Newsletter*. We had appended a brief commentary to the article which described ecclesiastical events in Serbia. You wrote to me that "you sinned in publicizing your disagreement with Church policy without first asking for an explanation. Yet, at the same time, you state in your letter that "the hierarchy which gave you shelter and placed you under its omophorion remains unchanged and unswerving in its faithfulness to a pure confession of the Holy Orthodox Faith".

Dear Vladika, on the one hand I am encouraged that you seek to reassure me that our Synod remains "unchanged and unswerving in its faithfulness to the Holy Orthodox Faith." But on the other hand, that being the case, I cannot but be saddened by your statement that I had sinned. How did I sin? Because we stated that it was wrong for Anglicans to use Orthodox Altars and Holy Tables? Because we wrote that it was improper to accord a heterodox "bishop" the honors due only to Orthodox Bishops? How is this sinful or out of order? Frankly, our silence could have only encouraged those who seek to compromise our Synod's courageous stand in regard to ecumenism.

The bulletin statements could not have been misconstrued by anyone except those who wish to justify and extend our continued communion with the Serbian Church. In your letter to me, Vladika, you mentioned that our *Witness* "attacked the hierarchy of the Serbian Church." Respected Vladika, how can that article in the *Witness* be termed an "attack" when, with sorrow, it noted all the un-Orthodox and ecumenistic events that took place, when Ramsey visited Serbia? Is it an "attack" to mention the holy canons? Is it an "attack" when the Serbian Church openly advertises and boasts of its activities in the ecumenical sphere? Indeed, how else would we have learned of them, had not they themselves published and proclaimed to the world all the sad details? The Serbian patriarch himself, in the words of Fr. Justin Popovich, had become the leader of 300 protestant churches by being a president of the World Council of Churches.

Only a short time ago, under the leadership of the late Metropolitan Philaret of Blessed Memory, was the anathema against ecumenism and modernism issued by our Synodal bishops. The Anathema was not against an abstract idea. It states openly that it is against "those who" promote ecumenism in word and deed. Surely a document of such universal significance cannot be ignored or forgotten by our own bishops who promulgated it. Since the Serbian Church by its own arbitrary actions has fallen under our Synod's anathema against ecumenism, is it possible that we can ignore these actions simply on the basis of friendship extended to our Synod at one time? Friendship is friendship and can be strengthened, forgotten or violated; doctrinal truth remains constant and unchanging. If we have true friendship with ecclesiastical bodies it is because we share the same confession of faith. Indeed, true friendship demands that we point out something that may be harmful or detrimental. The Serbian Church has offended our friendship by asking us to condone their violation of the canonical and doctrinal norms of the Church. Even in the times of persecution in the past, the Church *never* condoned doctrinal deviations. External conditions, including persecution, cannot determine what the Church teaches.

I must confess with some sadness that your letter reminds me very much of a letter I received in 1967 from the Greek Archdiocese. In this letter thoughts similar to yours were expressed to me by Fr. George Bacopoulos, the Chancellor of the Archdiocese. I never could have imagined that I would have received a similar letter from the Synod of Bishops.

Vladika, I am of Greek extraction and I love my people and my heritage. However, this does not mean that I must close my eyes to what my fellow Hellenes are doing in the ecumenical sphere. Only today, the press reported the joint prayer services for peace in Assisi, Italy in which the Pope, the Greek Archbishop of Thyatira in London, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rabbis, the Dhali Lama, Snake worshippers, Zorosatrians, American Indians with peace pipes, and representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate took part. And is not the Serbian Church in full communion with the Soviet Church?

I ask for your Holy Prayers.

Respectfully,

Fr. Nektas S. Palassis

P.S. In going through my files, I discovered a letter which I wrote to Vladika Laurus some eight years ago. At that time, Vladika had expressed to my ruling bishop, Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco, a complaint regarding an article in the *Witness*. That communication was so garbled by the time that it reached me (Vladika Anthony told Vladika Nektary, who told Fr. Deacon Paul Gribanovsky, who in turn told me) that I requested Vladika Laurus to write to me directly, which he did. I am enclosing a copy of

that letter for you because its subject matter is so relevant to our church situation today. I did not receive any reply from Vladika Laurus.¹

The fact that Vladika Laurus did not reply is ironic, especially since it was communicated to me that our beloved Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory had endorsed the content of my letter.

cc: Metropolitan Vitaly
Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco
Encl. 1

¹ See [Archbishop Laurus' Letter to Fr. Nektas Palassis, 1978](#) and [Fr. Nektas Palassis Reply to Archbishop Laurus, 1978](#)